4-2012

South Africa, multilateralism and the global politics of development

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DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/ejdr.2012.4

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Jordaan, Eduard. The European Journal of Development Research, vol. 24, Issue 2 (Apr 2012): 283-299.

Abstract

South Africa was recently included as a member of the BRICS grouping. South Africa's formal association with the powerful original members suggests that it possesses some international clout. Although South Africa pursues an active foreign policy, for example, as a region organizer, notably through New Partnership for Africa's Development, and as an issue leader championing development-related concerns, the normative direction of South Africa's international involvement has been unclear and often contradictory. This article illustrates how South Africa adheres to and departs from liberal principles when involved in the global politics of development. Middlepowership and domestic politics are identified as two sources of pressure on the liberal aspects of South African foreign policy.

Introduction

It is with some justification that South Africa is regarded as a leader of the developing world. The country campaigned for debt relief for heavily indebted poor countries, for the World Trade Organization (WTO) to relax its patent protection on AIDS drugs, for the Doha Round of trade negotiations to be one that places 'development' at its heart, and played a leading role in the Kimberley Process to halt the flow of conflict diamonds, to name a few examples of its leadership on issues of importance to developing countries. Although the remarkable economic progress of Brazil, China and India has left South Africa trailing further behind, South Africa continues to be included as a voice for the developing world: South Africa was involved in last-ditch negotiations between US President Barack Obama and major developing countries to extract an agreement at the 2009 United Nations (UN) climate change talks in Copenhagen; South Africa is frequently invited to contribute to G8 summits; it is the only African member of the G20; and recently joined the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) grouping, now known as 'BRICS'.

Despite the illustrious company it keeps, South Africa has limited international power. South Africa's efforts to influence matters beyond its borders are typically met with resistance, even from other developing countries, especially in Africa, on whose behalf it claims to speak. In response, South Africa has made wide use of multilateral diplomacy to augment its influence and smooth over resistance from others. Indeed, South Africa has sought to make multilateralism 'a central plank of its foreign policy' (Taylor and Williams, 2006, p. 9). However, identifying the principles that underlie South Africa's foreign policy has proved challenging. South African foreign policy has been described as vacillating and marked by '*ad-hoc*-ery' (Evans, 1999, p. 624). Moreover, sometimes, South Africa acts as a 'pro-Western bridge builder' (Taylor and Williams, 2006, p. 6), for example, by getting other developing countries to sign on to an indefinite extension of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995 (Leith and Pretorius, 2009, p. 350) or pushing other developing countries to adopt the neoliberal orthodoxy. On the other hand, Gerson (2008) has claimed that South Africa has deviated so far from the West that it should be called a

'rogue democracy', whereas Nathan sees anti-imperialism as an important strain in South African foreign policy (Nathan, 2005, p. 363).

Ian Taylor's (2001) work represents probably the most articulate and theoretically self-conscious attempt to come to grips with the contradictions in South Africa's foreign policy. Many expected that the African National Congress (ANC), with its leftist leanings, its partnership with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and trade-union federation COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), and the extreme poverty of the bulk of its supporters, would pursue strongly redistributionist and interventionist economic policies when it assumed power in 1994. Although the ANC's 1994 economic plan, the Reconstruction and Development Program, contained some Keynesian elements, it was soon subordinated to the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) plan. GEAR was a neoliberal response to the economic pressures of globalization, and as such pursued fiscal prudence, the liberalization of the South African economy, and foreign direct investment. While GEAR was welcomed by externally oriented capital, it was a betrayal of the ANC's supporters on the left (the trade unions and the poor). In Taylor's view, the contradictions in South African foreign policy stem from the conflicting demands of capital and the economic left. As South African economic policy has moved in favor of capital, the ANC government has, in order to placate its left-leaning domestic constituencies, rhetorically exaggerated its confrontation with the capitalist core.

Taylor's is a neo-Marxist perspective, specifically an application of Robert Cox's (1996) adoption of Gramsci's ideas to international relations (IR). Taylor's reliance on Cox leads him to focus on institutions and conflicts that are mostly economic in nature and to relate these conflicts to those engendered by capitalism. Taylor's argument has been deservedly influential, but his theoretical commitments lead him to exclude or diminish foreign policy issues that are not primarily or necessarily economic, such as issues of human rights, culture, democracy, peacemaking, peacekeeping and race. Moreover, once one studies the more political aspects of South Africa's foreign policy in their own right, the country's diplomacy appears less closely hewn to the West.

This article considers South Africa's involvement in the global politics of development and aims to identify the country's foreign policy contradictions and how these find expression in various multilateral settings. Although all states face constraints on their international behavior, the very idea of foreign policy implies a measure of agency; policymakers have some choice about which course of action to pursue. These choices are, at bottom, normative for they involve expressions about what we ought to do and which courses of action we must relegate or forego. Contradictions in South African foreign policy are presented as torn by five normative tensions (the next section). The identification of these five dimensions is a response to Vale and Taylor's (1999, p. 632) charge that scholars have paid too little attention 'to the overall thrust of South African foreign policy: the normative principles that underlie Pretoria's interaction with the international community'.

Liberal views occupy one side of the five normative tensions. Although the opposite side cannot be brought under one ideological umbrella, the five departures from liberalism all give greater weight to the goals of the collective and thus tolerate greater intrusions on individual freedom than does liberalism. This means that on political and cultural matters, these departures from liberalism move in a communitarian direction, whereas on the economy it finds support in intellectual currents that argue for a greater role of the state in the economy. Liberalism is placed at the center because it is more comfortable including economic and political foreign policy issues than is Taylor's Coxian perspective.

Although liberalism is the ideological accompaniment of the American-led post-war international order (Ikenberry, 2011), liberalism is also, given its emphasis on freedom and human rights, a persuasive moral outlook in its own right. Attacks on liberal principles are therefore not only attacks on the West, but are also departures from the most widely accepted international moral perspective.

Although morality matters in the making of foreign policy decisions, the next section points to two sources of strain on the liberal aspects of South Africa's foreign policy: domestic politics and pressures that stem from South Africa's effort to perform a 'middle power' role in the international system. The subsequent, longer section discusses South Africa's participation in four multilateral forums and indicates the conflicting normative principles that find expression. Three of these institutions - The India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and WTO - are directly concerned with development, whereas the fourth - the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) - is not. However, the UNSC is included because much of South Africa's multilateralism takes into account what happens in the UNSC.

Deviations from Liberalism

In theoretical discussions of IR, the empirical is typically put in the foreground, whereas the normative aspects, although inescapable, are pushed to the back or ignored altogether (Frost, 1996). In this article, however, the normative aspects are brought to the fore and are used as the lens through which to view South Africa's multilateral diplomacy. In the five normative disputes below, liberal principles occupy one side. No obvious factor unites the other side.

There are many forms of liberalism, but what unites them is the priority they give to freedom. Liberalism, as a theory of IR, tries to explain and predict international interaction. Liberal IR theory gives freedom an explanatory role - the capacity to choose allows for cooperation, moral progress and the option to avoid the unpleasant outcomes that realism sees as inevitable. However, in liberal theory, as in other IR theories, prescriptions are never far from view. This article focuses on the prescriptive, or normative, aspects of liberalism, that is, liberalism as a perspective on what is morally correct, rather than on liberalism as a theory that explains international interaction.

The first of the five normative conflicts concerns the priority of liberal democracy, a political form in which negative freedom is the ultimate value. Liberals fear the oppression that individuals might have to endure if other values were to be given priority. John Rawls (1999a), for example, in his attempt to identify the fundamental principles of justice, gives the liberty principle priority over equalitarian principles. However, political societies and their leaders might have priorities that require a restriction of certain freedom in order to achieve more communal goals such as political stability, economic development or a theocratic vision (Table 1).

Table 1: Five normative tensions in South African foreign policy

	Liberal	*Non-liberal*
View of democracy	Negative liberty is the highest value	Tolerates curtailments of negative liberty in pursuit of other political goals
Human rights versus sovereignty	Human rights trump sovereignty	Sovereignty trumps human rights
Solving moral questions	Aspires to universal agreement	Emphasizes culture and context; sees universalism as a Western imposition
Neoliberal economic order	Broadly accepting, blames poverty on national factors	Sees it as unfair, blames poverty on global factors
Role of state in the economy	Wants markets to be as free as possible; markets have progressive consequences	Sees economic interaction as conflictual and unequal; state necessary for progressive goals

The liberal regards human rights as universally applicable, whereas the opposite side allows for national sovereignty to trump universal human rights when these two principles come into conflict. Even Rawls (1999b), who is relatively tolerant of the limits that other states may place on internal political freedom, requires that societies, in order to be regarded as at least 'decent', respect human rights (which includes the right to life and enough freedom of conscience to ensure freedom of thought), allow the right to dissent, and require their officials to treat such dissent with respect and address the merits of the question. Moral justification for giving priority to the sovereignty principle can be derived from the idea of self-determination and from an understanding of the individual as deeply formed by the culture in which she grew up. In recent years, there has been a greater acceptance that the sovereignty of states may be violated to protect human rights, which we see, for example, in the UN's adoption of the 'responsibility to protect' and the prosecution by the International Criminal Court of political leaders guilty of crimes against humanity.

Liberals aspire to deracinated human relations and think that universal agreement on moral questions is both possible and desirable. Communitarian critics of liberalism hold that there is no such thing as universal moral truths and emphasize that moral perspectives are bound and shaped by social context (Mulhall and Swift, 1996). Communitarians further argue that individual flourishing requires a certain closure of the political community so as to sustain the forms of life that give meaning to culturally situated individuals. In the African context, communitarian perspectives are blended with memories of colonial subjugation. Hence, liberal optimism about the possibility of universal moral agreement is met with perspectives that see cultural and racial relations as fraught with antagonism, inequality and representations of Africans as inferior. Moreover, liberalism's purported moral universalism is seen as a culturally specific moral perspective backed by hegemonic power. As a result, liberalism is likely to encounter charges of racial or cultural chauvinism and an insistence on the equal validity of non-Western cultures.

Liberals broadly accept the current neoliberal economic order; at most, they seek slight adjustments for the benefit of the world's poor, whereas the opposite side sees the international economic order as inherently unfair. Liberals tend to locate the causes of (and therefore the solution for) African poverty at the national level, whereas its African critics point to structural factors in the global economy. A clear example is the World Bank and the Organization for African Unity's (OAU) divergent explanations of Africa's poor economic performance in the 1970s. The World Bank's 'Berg Report' claimed that

'domestic policy issues are at the heart of the crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa' (quoted in Loxley, 1983, p. 197), whereas the OAU's Lagos Plan of Action advanced a dependency argument (Taylor, 2005, p. 21).

As for the appropriate relation between the state and the economy, liberals generally seek as much scope as possible for the free market. They see the market as a mechanism for achieving progressive aims. Critics of the liberal economic view see economic interaction as ridden by conflict and unequal power relations and tend to look to the state to achieve progressive objectives. Discomfort with the market mechanism thus pushes these critics toward either nationalization or the state-directed economic strategies characteristic of East Asian developmental states.

Pressures on Liberalism

Two factors seem to be of particular importance in explaining South Africa's foreign policy departures from liberalism: South Africa's particular middlepowership and its domestic politics.

South Africa is frequently identified as a middle power (Hamill and Lee, 2001; Leith and Pretorius, 2009). Middle powers pursue activist foreign policies and perform two functions in the international system: they infuse the hegemonic order with legitimacy and they play a bridging role, the latter by mediating and brokering deals between conflicting third parties, building coalitions and consensus around matters of supranational importance and steering international interaction to multilateral settings (Cox, 1996, p. 245).

In order to distinguish South Africa from traditional middle powers such as Australia, Canada or Norway, South Africa is often identified as an 'emerging' middle power (Van der Westhuizen, 1998; Nel et al, 2001; Schoeman, 2003). Such characterizations are intended to suggest that the country's middle power behavior is of recent vintage rather than that its behavior differs significantly from traditional middle powers. However, although South Africa continues to perform the actions that first led commentators to identify the country as a middle power, such as strengthening multilateral institutions, building coalitions and managing conflict, the normative orientation of South African middlepowership differs from that of traditional middle powers. Traditional middle powers remain close to the liberal values of the international order, whereas South African middlepowership frequently breaks out of the liberal normative band. This means that South Africa uses middle power strategies to both uphold and delegitimize the values of the Western-led international order.

In order to broker a settlement between conflicting parties, middle powers have to assume a position between them. It is at these interjections that South African foreign policy gets pulled in disparate directions. In the economic domain, South Africa, as a spokesperson for the developing world, has had to navigate between the interests of global capital and more marginal groups. In disagreements over solutions to international conflicts of a more political nature, South Africa has frequently found itself between the West and various developing country groupings (Southern African Development Community (SADC), African Union (AU), Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and BRICS). Loyalty to developing country groupings pulls South Africa away from fully embracing the typically more liberal positions of the West.

Domestic politics is a second source of pressure on the liberal aspects of South Africa's foreign policy. Although citizens are largely excluded from the foreign policy process in South Africa (Nel et al, 2004, p. 49), domestic political beliefs and debates do find expression in the country's foreign policy actions (Friedman, 2008, pp. 38-43). The three domestic political battles identified below provide a frame for much of South Africa's interaction with the rest of the world.

The first struggle is over the role of the state in the economy. The story of South Africa's embrace of neoliberal economic policies was mentioned above and has been skillfully told elsewhere (Taylor, 2001; Marais, 2011). Throughout the Mandela and Mbeki presidencies, the ANC's partners on the left grumbled but were kept at bay. However, in 2008, the left-wing of the tripartite alliance ousted Mbeki, the neoliberal technocrat, and (eventually) installed Jacob Zuma as president, a presumed champion of the working class. The struggle between Zuma and Mbeki became a struggle over the direction of the ANC project (Southall, 2009, p. 317). Although Zuma fanned ethnic and racial tensions in support of his cause, he owed his rise primarily to anti-liberal economic forces - COSATU, the SACP and the ANC Youth League (ANCYL). The power of the economic left can be seen in the widespread acceptance in ANC circles of the idea that South Africa should become a 'developmental state' (Vickers, 2010, p. 154) and the return of economic nationalization to the agenda.

The second battle concerns the nature of democracy. The anti-apartheid struggle was fought on the liberal idea that all people are equal, summed up by the anti-apartheid slogan 'one person, one vote'. South African democracy is marked by powerful liberal elements: a very liberal constitution, the rule of law, independent and well-functioning courts and a vocal media. However, the liberal aspects of democracy have come under strain. The attack on the liberal components of South African democracy gathered pace as the battle between Zuma and Mbeki raged. Recent years have seen attempts to undermine judicial independence, the lenient treatment of politically connected criminals, a weakening or dismantling of agencies with prosecutorial powers, encroachment on the editorial independence of the state-owned South African Broadcasting Corporation, Zuma filing lawsuits against his critics for alleged defamation, and the pushing through of a 'Protection of State Information Bill' that would allow bureaucrats to mark broad swathes of information as state 'secrets' and therefore off-limits.

The third struggle concerns the issue of race. The fight against apartheid was against the oppression of Blacks by Whites, which itself is part of the wider struggle against Europe's colonial subjugation of Africa, and thus connects the plight of Black South Africans with the other peoples in Africa. The ANC's definition of itself as a non-racial organization and its goal of non-racialism strike one as rather awkward if one considers the primacy of race during apartheid and the struggle against it. It was the ANC's commitment to non-racialism that resulted in Robert Sobukwe and his followers' breaking away from the ANC to form the Pan African Congress, an Africanist organization. In a study of Black political thought in South Africa, Halisi (1999) claims that Black South Africans remain torn between non-racialism and 'Black republicanism'. Despite the ANC's avowed non-racialism, it has been forced to promote the cause of Blacks to realize an equal non-racialism, an imperative that even the main opposition party, the right-of-center Democratic Alliance, accepts. Ironically, redress of past inequalities thus requires a re-racialization of South African society. This seems acceptable to liberals if the eventual goal remains non-racialism. However, Mbeki asserted a more Africanist posture than Mandela, exemplified by Mbeki's famous 1996 speech in which he declared 'I am an African'. Aspiring to non-racialism while promoting one racial group has proved to be tricky, and there are signs that racial

integration is stalling and racial tensions are growing (Southall, 2010; mg.co.za/article/2009-12-09-survey-reveals-pessimism-over-race-relations-in-sa).

One might wonder about the sources of support and opposition to liberalism. The Democracy Alliance best embodies a commitment to liberal principles. Other liberal institutions include the print media, big business, the finance ministry and think tanks such as the Institute for Democracy in South Africa and the South African Institute for International Affairs. The ANC contains a fair number of liberals (for example, Trevor Manuel), but they have been in retreat since the rise of Zuma. The SACP and the ANCYL are the most vehemently anti-liberal groupings. On economic matters, COSATU supports the idea of turning South Africa into a developmental state and nationalizing the mines. However, on political matters, it is frequently more liberal than the ANC, for instance, by being more willing to criticize the Mugabe regime and warning that it would protest against the abovementioned 'secrecy bill'. Mbeki strikes one as a liberal, although his calls for an African Renaissance, his touchiness on race, and his defense of the sovereignty of other developing countries run counter to liberalism. Although Zuma was helped into power by the economic left, it is not clear that he shares their ideals. His main departure from liberalism comes on the cultural and democratic front: he is a polygamist; frequently speaks Zulu instead of English at political rallies; invokes the authority of the ancestors; during his rape trial, invoked Zulu 'traditions' in his defense; and, during his corruption trial, failed to stop his supporters from threatening the courts and slandering judges (Marais, 2011, p. 372).

This section pointed to South Africa's specific position as a middle power and to the country's domestic politics as sources of pressure on South Africa's ability to uphold liberal principles in its foreign policy. The next section examines how these pressures find expression in South Africa's involvement in four multilateral forums.

South Africa and Four Multilateral Institutions

Middle powers direct much of their foreign policy through multilateral channels. Nel et al (2001, p. 9) distinguish between multilateral diplomacy and multilateralism. The former refers to 'the involvement of official state actors in the practices and institutions that facilitate cooperation between three or more states'. Multilateralism, according to Ruggie (1992, p. 571), refers to a pattern of international interaction whereby actors may not discriminate against other actors who want to cooperate; all actors derive roughly equal benefit over time (diffuse reciprocity); and members of a collectivity are regarded as indivisible. South Africa has challenged the failure to adhere to norms of non-discrimination and diffuse reciprocity at the UN and WTO. However, challenges to core multilateral institutions in terms of Ruggie's norms do not tell the full story, for we are left in the dark of what South Africa's preferences would be even when interactions conform to Ruggie's characterization. As Nel et al (2001, p. 13) put it, 'we cannot avoid asking normative questions [in the sense of what is the "good"] about the institution of multilateralism, and particularly South Africa's conduct with respect to it'. Cox (1996, pp. 139-141) points out that the multilateral institutions created after World War II served to spread and legitimize the values of American hegemony. Taylor and Williams (2006, p. 5) remind us, however, that although multilateral institutions bear the imprint of the power relations that prevailed at their time of birth, they are also sites of political struggle, the outcome of which is not certain (Taylor and Williams, 2006, p. 5). South Africa has certainly seen multilateral institutions as a site for challenging the hegemonic order, specifically the liberalism that characterizes this order.

Before proceeding, one can make three observations about the patterns in South Africa's multilateral diplomacy. First, beyond using core multilateral institutions as arenas for challenging Western states, South Africa also tries to shift action and jurisdiction away from core multilateral institutions to multilateral locales where lesser states have more influence and where commitment to liberal principles are weaker. Second, although South Africa frequently mixes liberal and non-liberal elements, the pull away from liberalism is the strongest when the issue at hand is more political rather than economic, and when an African state is involved. Third, in terms of the four modes of international engagement identified by vom Hau et al (2012), South Africa can be said to display all four, without exhibiting a clear preference for any particular mode. In this article, however, the focus will be on South Africa as a 'region organizer' for its taking on of leadership roles in regionally defined organizations and as a 'region mobilizer' for its efforts to strengthen ties with neighboring countries.

The United Nations Security Council

Many of the UNSC's decisions (and non-decisions) reflect the permutations that stem from its structure - five permanent members with a veto and ten non-veto members serving 2-year stints. Reform of the UNSC is a key concern for many developing countries and their organizations. The AU, NAM and IBSA all want a more inclusive Security Council. South Africa, a likely beneficiary of an expanded UNSC, has been at the forefront of efforts to reform the Council. South Africa argues that the Security Council should better reflect 'changed geopolitical realities' (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2009, p. 25). Past campaigns for Security Council reform have been stillborn because it would require permanent members to willingly dilute their own influence. However, during a BRICS summit in April 2011, Security Council reform inched away from the realm of fantasy when Russia and China came out supporting Brazil, India and South Africa 'to play a greater role in the UN' (www.thestar.co.za/brics-call-for-un-security-council-reform-1.1057014).

South Africa has also challenged the West in the day-to-day business of the Council, on which it served during 2007-2008 and will again do so in 2011-2012. Although South Africa's voting record suggests considerable conformity - during its 2007-2008 term, South Africa voted in favor of 120 of 121 resolutions (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2009, p. 8) - the country emerged as a highly recalcitrant member of the Security Council. UN Watch, a non-governmental watchdog, points out that when it came to voting on human rights issues, South Africa's record in 2007 was worse than that of Saudi Arabia (blog.unwatch.org/index.php/2010/10/12/rights-activists-urge-south-africa-to-vote-like-a-democracy-on-security-council-recall-poor-voting-record-of-prior-term/). When South Africa tried to obstruct Western powers from using the Security Council to extend their influence, it did so in principally two ways. First, South Africa would oppose or try to water down resolutions that insisted on liberal principles such as human rights or individual culpability. Second, South Africa would question whether the Security Council is the appropriate institution for dealing with a specific issue and try to push the matter toward a jurisdiction where Western powers have less influence. These ploys are visible in the South Africa's four most controversial stances during its 2007-2008 term.

South Africa started its stint on the Security Council by voting, alongside Russia and China, against a resolution condemning human rights abuses in Burma. South Africa pointed to a finding by the Association of Southeast Asian Nations that Burma does not pose a threat to regional security. However, South Africa's argument that the matter should be handled by the UN Human Rights Council (HRC)

featured more prominently. The HRC is an organization in which the 'Western European and Others' group is assigned only seven of the 47 seats. The HRC was created in 2005 to replace the UN Commission on Human Rights, which had become too politicized. However, in its short existence, the HRC has already become just as politicized and prone to regional block voting as its predecessor. At the HRC, regional groups 'never issue statements that are critical of one of their own' and tend rather to congratulate their neighbors and allies on their human rights records (Abebe, 2009, p. 19).

As a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), South Africa's involvement with concerns over Iran's nuclear program followed it into the Security Council. At the IAEA, South Africa opposed referring Iran to the Security Council, a body able to impose sanctions. South Africa maintained this position, even as a number of other NAM states in the IAEA succumbed to pressure and moved to favor reporting Iran to the Security Council (Ogilvie-White, 2007, pp. 461-466). When a draft resolution to impose stiffer sanction on Iran came before the Security Council in March 2007, South Africa sought a substantial weakening of the proposed sanctions, as well as a 90-day time-out to allow for further negotiation with Iran (http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2007-03-20-voa2.html). Although the final resolution was adopted unanimously in close to its original form, South Africa expressed its disappointment and continued to argue that the Security Council was not the appropriate forum to deal with Iran's nuclear program.

South Africa has since 2004 been involved in efforts to resolve various aspects of the brutal conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan. During this time, South Africa consistently tried to pull the problems in Sudan toward the jurisdiction of the AU, on whose behalf Mbeki was acting as a negotiator. South Africa preferred a soft rather than a punitive approach to Khartoum. Although one could make a case for 'quiet diplomacy', there is more to South Africa's soft approach than solving the conflict at hand; it was also intended as a challenge to the West and an effort to keep them at bay. As Dumisani Kumalo, South Africa's ambassador to the UN, admitted in 2004, 'We [South Africa] want to resolve the issue and there are countries just dying to punish Sudan for what is happening and that is why the call for the reform of the UN is getting louder' (196.35.74.234/world/other/0,2172,88130,00.html). During its 2007-2008 term on the Security Council, South Africa once more got to apply its soft diplomatic touch when, in July 2007, it opposed a draft resolution (put forward by Britain, France and Ghana) to impose sanctions against Sudan, with Kumalo calling any mention of sanctions 'totally unacceptable' (news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/6902400.stm).

The most notorious example of South Africa's gentle diplomacy has been its long-standing mollycoddling of the oppressive Mugabe regime in neighboring Zimbabwe. The Zimbabwe case is an excellent example of South Africa's preference for political stability rather than democracy and of South Africa's effort to protect the sovereignty of a developing country. South Africa has consistently argued that Zimbabwe's problems do not pose a threat to international security and should thus be dealt with by the SADC, not the Security Council. At the Security Council, South Africa continued its protection of the Zimbabwean government, when, during April 2008, South Africa opposed the sending of a UN envoy to Zimbabwe to resolve the standoff that followed the 29 March election. It was therefore surprising when, on 23 June 2008, South Africa and the other 14 members of the Security Council passed a 'Presidential Statement' deploring the political repression that surrounded the March 2008 elections. However, less than 3 weeks later, South Africa voted against a draft resolution to impose an arms embargo on Zimbabwe and a financial freeze and travel ban on its leaders. South Africa repeatedly argued that any international moves would undermine Mbeki's efforts, under the SADC banner, to solve the post-election crisis.

South Africa's actions on the Security Council (2007-2008) frequently reflected an insistence on respect for national sovereignty and an effort to evade Western efforts to apply liberal standards to various conflicts. Although one may certainly question Western motives, South African resistance nevertheless resulted in the weakening of human rights principles and the protection of abusive rulers. Under the Zuma presidency, there have been signs that South African foreign policy might return to the greater liberalism of the Mandela era. For one, Zuma has taken a tougher line on Zimbabwe. More significantly, on 17 March 2011, South Africa, alongside France, Britain and the United States, voted in favor of Security Council resolution 1973 to impose a no-fly zone over Libya. This vote was a move away from South Africa's usual exaggerated loyalty to incumbents in the developing world and made more significant by the abstention of the other four BRICS members. Moreover, just a week before, the AU had 'reaffirmed its strong commitment to the respect of the unity and territorial integrity of Libya, as well as its rejection of any foreign military intervention, whatever its form' (African Union, 2011a, p. 1). However, the troubles in Libya soon brought out the illiberal tendencies in South African foreign policy. A few weeks after the Security Council vote, South Africa joined its BRICS partners in condemning NATO air strikes on Libya. Throughout, the AU insisted on a bigger role in solving the Libyan situation, for it was a conflict that it saw as holding 'far-reaching consequences, especially given the important role that the country has been playing in the implementation of the African agenda' (African Union, 2011b, p. 3). In the first part of April, the AU, led by South Africa, did get 'brother leader', as Zuma referred to Gaddafi, to accept a ceasefire. However, the rebels rejected the 'roadmap for peace' because it contained no demand that Gaddafi relinquish power. The AU deal also went against the West's insistence that Gaddafi step down. As the war wound down, South Africa continued to criticize NATO's role in Libya and only recognized the rebels as the legitimate government of the Libya well after major African states such as Nigeria and Kenya. Tellingly, after Gaddafi had met his end, the ANCYL took to the streets to bemoan the fall of an 'anti-imperialist martyr' (www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2011/10/21/anc-youth-league-salutes-gaddafi).

Although South Africa went along with the vast majority of resolutions that passed through the Security Council, when South Africa did depart from the liberal script it was to support various developing country groupings against the wishes of the Western powers on the Council. However, a desire for solidarity with the developing world was on its own not enough to lead South Africa away from liberal commitments to democracy and human rights. Rather, South Africa's departures from liberal principles in its foreign policy also depended on no more than weak or fractured domestic support for liberalism in order for such illiberal foreign policy stances to pass.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

NEPAD is a merger of the Omega Plan of Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade and the Millennium Partnership for the African Recovery Program (MAP) of Mbeki, Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo and Algeria's Abdelaziz Bouteflika. NEPAD is an excellent example of South Africa's engagement in region organizing behavior (see vom Hau et al, this issue). After NEPAD's launch in 2001, Mbeki became the principal spokesperson for NEPAD, a plan that sought to lift Africa out of poverty and integrate African economies with each other and with the rest of the world. Whereas Africa's previous big economic plan, the Lagos Plan of Action of 1980, was rooted in dependency theory, NEPAD represents a step in a liberal

direction for its willingness to blame much of Africa's problems on bad governance and policies and for its embrace of the market (Taylor, 2005, p. 21). Moreover, NEPAD's peer review mechanism represents a soft effort to let liberal values pierce national sovereignty. However, NEPAD harbors significant departures from liberalism - it sees the state as the main economic driver; it is ambivalent about whether it favors democracy or political stability (Jordaan, 2007, p. 349); it is strongly pan-Africanist; and, in practice, has remained very respectful of national sovereignty.

Although criticism of NEPAD has mounted, South Africa continues to support it, by, for example, hosting the NEPAD Secretariat (now called the NEPAD Planning and Coordinating Agency). NEPAD is a South African-led attempt to use multilateral institutions to promote development and moderate the behavior and policies of African countries in a liberal direction. However, NEPAD has accomplished little of tangible significance. NEPAD itself tells us that progress between 2005 and 2008 had been 'negligible' (NEPAD, 2011, p. 7), whereas Ross Herbert, who has been close to the entire NEPAD process, informs us that before 2005 NEPAD was mostly a 'talk shop' (www.theindependent.co.zw/opinion/17892.pdf).

However, it is not that easy to figure out exactly what NEPAD does. As Motsi puts it, NEPAD is an 'institution, secretariat, ideological manifestation, bargaining chip and validation instrument', an entity 'impossible to coherently analyze' (quoted in Taylor, 2010, p. 63). When reading NEPAD documents, one is confronted by a staggering web of cross-referenced institutions, jargon, targets, priorities, principles and commitments (see NEPAD, 2011). Ross Herbert (2003, p. 102) suggests that we understand NEPAD as performing three roles. First, NEPAD offers a collective voice for negotiating with donors. Donors were encouraged when a peer review mechanism was put at the center of NEPAD, because initially it seemed as though this instrument would force African leaders to govern better. However, Mbeki soon decried the 'ignorance and confusion' of donors who expected peer review to contain a punitive element. He emphasized that the envisioned peer review would be 'non-adversarial' and based on 'mutual trust among states involved in the review' (ANC, 2002). In other words, Mbeki immediately caved toward respect for national sovereignty. As what was most distinctive and promising about NEPAD was stripped at the outset, donors have allocated mere 'token' funds to NEPAD initiatives (http://www.theindependent.co.zw/opinion/17892.html). NEPAD's budgetary details are hard to come by, but it is telling that whereas NEPAD's 2008 development 'action plan' estimated that its projects would cost US$115 billion, the 2011 plan puts its total needs at below US$11 billion (NEPAD, 2011, pp. 6-8).

Second, NEPAD acts as a development agency and claims that it is transforming itself into 'the first development agency of the continent' (mg.co.za/article/2010-03-19-the-new-nepad). NEPAD has certainly attached its name to a number of projects, from research on food security to rural development programs. But that is just it. Rather than designing and directing projects, it seems that NEPAD mostly puts its name on projects that originated elsewhere (Taylor, 2005).

NEPAD's third role is as creator and enforcer of standards of economic and political governance - the task of the African Peer Review Mechanism. Countries that sign up for review volunteer to let their African peers assess their performance in the economic, social, corporate and political domains. Unfortunately, the elaborate rituals of self-evaluation and peer assessment produced little new knowledge. Furthermore, peer review has proved utterly incapable of getting states under review to behave differently, especially on matters related to democracy, which, after all, was the basis on which NEPAD was promoted (Taylor, 2005, p. 64). Fourteen countries have thus far completed their review.

Among the first was Rwanda, which Freedom House regards as 'unfree', yet it sailed through its evaluation (Jordaan, 2007). In the case of Algeria, another country regarded as 'unfree' at the time of review, its peer reviewers were encouraged by the government's acknowledgement of the principles of good governance and its 'strong political will' to carry them out (NEPAD, 2007, p. 322). Neither Rwanda nor Algeria's Freedom House scores have budged since they passed their reviews (www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=21&year=2010). 1

Mbeki's early retreat on the invasiveness of African Peer Review Mechanism was out of recognition that African leaders would not be willing or able to change in the ways that Western donors expected of them. In the end, NEPAD did little more than put a liberal veneer on the neo-patrimonial governance that Taylor (2005) sees as characteristic of African politics. NEPAD offers streams of rhetoric on free markets, democracy and human rights, commitments that drew heavily from post-apartheid South Africa's example of democratization and economic liberalization. However, NEPAD, despite its generally liberal thrust, also contains significant deviations from liberalism - it pushes forward the state as the conductor of economic development and accepts circumscribed interpretations of democracy and human rights, which we know, after the earlier discussion of three defining struggles in South African politics (around race, democracy and the economy), are not without support in South African domestic politics.

World Trade Organization

South Africa signed on to the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1994 and became an active participant in subsequent WTO negotiations. Upon joining the WTO, South Africa tried to broker agreements within the organization and to promote and legitimize its project. However, in recent years, South Africa's participation in the WTO has changed. South Africa still tries to broker agreements and build coalitions within the organization, but it has adopted positions that are increasingly at odds with the Quad (Canada, European Union, Japan and the United States). One part of South Africa's disagreement with the Quad is liberal - it wants liberalization of the Northern agricultural markets - which, although it has long been a source of disagreement, 2 is a point on which South Africa has grown more insistent. The other and more recent departure from what the Western powers want is an effort to allow the state in the developing countries more room for maneuver.

In the wake of the Uruguay Round, many developing countries struggled to come to grips with its prescriptions. These countries balked at the prospect of having to deal with yet more new issues, particularly when industrialized states had not met many of their Uruguay Round commitments (Keet, 2002, pp. 7-10). South Africa, by contrast, favored the EU's proposal to move on to a new round of trade negotiations. Despite efforts to overcome their disagreements, South Africa entered the Third Ministerial Conference of the WTO in Seattle in 1999 at odds with other African countries. At the Seattle talks, South Africa was occasionally pulled into 'green room' meetings with the Quad where it was seen, as indeed it saw itself, as a leader of Africa. South Africa tried to act as a bridge between the industrialized world and the developing world, even though a deep schism had opened up between South Africa and the Africa Group (Keet, 2002, pp. 6-12). South Africa was simply too close to the West to convincingly perform a bridging role. Donna Lee (2006, p. 63) argues that during the early years of the Doha Round, no other developing country had 'so comprehensively conformed to the orthodoxy' as South Africa.

After the collapse of the Seattle talks, South Africa remained in favor of a further round of trade talks. South Africa tried to mend the gap between other developing countries and itself by adopting the position that industrialized states have not gone far enough to meet their Uruguay Round commitments (Keet, 2002, p. 19). South Africa also tried to win the assurance that the next round of trade talks would address the developmental concerns of poorer countries. Despite an effort at mending fences, South Africa's relations with other developing countries remained strained. In 2001, South Africa was still close to the major powers, its proximity suggested by its appointment as one of six 'Friends of the Chair' at the Doha Ministerial Conference during that year. However, the Fifth WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancun in 2003 marked the beginning of South Africa's shift away from the industrialized world (Vickers, 2010, p. 150). At Cancun, developing countries protested the inclusion of the so-called 'Singapore Issues' and were threatening to walk out of the negotiations.[3] South Africa, however, favored negotiation and was willing to keep the Singapore Issues on the table. South Africa found itself isolated from fellow members of developing country coalitions such as the G20+ and the Africa Group (Lee, 2006, p. 68). Despite South Africa's isolation, in the end, when developing countries staged a walkout, South Africa had little choice but to join their ranks.

After the collapse of the Cancun talks, South Africa began drifting away from the major powers. South Africa has grown more insistent that the United States and Europe liberalize their agricultural sectors. South Africa's current position is that an agreement on agriculture needs to occur before agreements on other aspects of trade can take place. Whereas a call for the liberalization of Northern agriculture is consistent with the liberal thrust of the WTO, South Africa, once an eager liberalizer, now wants more flexibility on the way developing countries may use industrial tariffs. South Africa's newfound desire to raise tariffs corresponds to its aspirations to become a developmental state, that is, a state that actively tries to develop internationally competitive industries in certain sectors, which often requires a tariff shield. Although a desire for state interference in the economy has long been present among South Africa's liberation movements, such interference contrasts with South Africa's behavior during the 1990s, when it liberalized its trade ahead of WTO stipulations and generally tried to get the state out of the economy (Vickers, 2010, pp. 154-155). However, Vickers (2010, pp. 170-171) points out that South Africa seems to have put more emphasis on agricultural trade reform than is warranted by the contribution of agriculture to the country's economy, which, although not unimportant, would bring fewer material benefits to South Africa than would a deal on more flexibility on non-agricultural goods.[4] This suggests that South Africa is giving agricultural liberalization such priority out of loyalty to other developing countries.

India-Brazil-South Africa Dialogue Forum

In the aftermath of the collapse of trade talks at Cancun, Trevor Manuel, the then South African finance minister, stated that 'The key question is whether the same grouping of developing countries [that walked out of the talks] would seek a new arrangement out of the Bretton Woods institutions' (Business Day, 2003). IBSA, created a few months before the Cancun trade talks, is not such an arrangement, nor is it intended to be. Rather, IBSA is, as its full name suggests, a forum for strategic dialogue between three developing country democracies. Although IBSA states wear their democratic credentials proudly, the organization has no intention of promoting democracy.

At the rhetorical level, IBSA remains committed to the liberalizing trajectory of global trade and to negotiated solutions in the WTO. However, the participation of all three IBSA members in the walkout at Cancun suggests that rhetoric masks the extent to which they are at odds with industrialized states. IBSA demands that industrialized states undertake greater liberalization, especially of their agricultural sectors, commit to the developmental goals of the Doha Round and lower their demands for liberalization by developing countries. However, although IBSA's desire for 'globalization with equity' chafes against the inequality that economic liberalization causes, it remains well within the liberal paradigm (Taylor, 2009).

However, it is the connections that IBSA states have developed that present a more significant challenge to the West. For one, bilateral trade among the IBSA states has grown exponentially (see Taylor, 2009, p. 51) and constitutes what some realists would call a form of 'soft-balancing' against the hegemon (Pape, 2005, p. 37). Moreover, IBSA states have undertaken to closely coordinate their actions and work in partnership with other developing countries. The IBSA grouping insists on reform of the UN General Assembly and wants the Security Council to add more permanent and non-permanent seats, with more developing countries occupying more of both types. Such ambitions are nothing new, but, as mentioned above, what has changed is that Russia and China are lending more support to the aspirations of the IBSA states. Given that support for IBSA's UN ambitions comes from the two authoritarian members of the BRICS grouping, we have reason to worry about the role of a possibly reformed Council in the protection of human rights. We might have been given a glimpse of things to come when, in late 2011, during a vote in the Security Council on whether to threaten Syria with economic sanctions for its brutal crackdown on opponents of the regime, all three IBSA states abstained, whereas China and Russia vetoed.

In the Brasilia Declaration of 2003, the founding document of IBSA, the three members point out that they are 'vibrant democracies', yet the document does not contain any commitment to promote democracy or human rights, even though it includes a commitment to protect people against second-hand tobacco smoke. The declarations that have followed the four further IBSA summits - the most recent one was held in April 2010 - continue to proclaim the democratic credentials of the three member states, but still do not profess any commitment to promote democracy. By contrast, a commitment to human rights began appearing in the declaration made after the second summit in 2007. However, this commitment is always expressed with reference to IBSA states' membership and commitment to the HRC as the appropriate forum for human rights issues. As discussed above, the HRC is a South-dominated enclave, which, rather than promote the cause of human rights, more often than not serves to ward off human rights criticism. IBSA's tepid commitment to human rights suggests that in a somehow reformed Security Council, in which these three states will most probably enjoy an enhanced position, the IBSA powers, alongside their undemocratic backers in Russia and China, will decline to defend human rights or will shuffle it off to the HRC where little will come of it.

South Africa's involvement in IBSA plays out the foreign policy pattern that should be familiar by now: increased solidarity with other developing countries; a broad commitment to liberal economic policies, coupled with an attempt to allow more room for the state; and little appetite to promote human rights or democracy elsewhere in the world.

Conclusion

South Africa's foreign policy has long been plagued by contradictions. This article tied one pole of this contradictoriness to liberal principles in order to study South Africa's engagement with four multilateral institutions (the Security Council, NEPAD, WTO and IBSA). It was shown that South African multilateralism frequently wavered in its commitment to liberal principles and that it was especially on matters of a political rather than an economic nature that South Africa moved away from its liberal commitments. The reasons for these departures from liberalism were said to reside, first, in South Africa's fraught position as an emerging middle power trying to mediate between the West and the developing world and, second, in the central struggles in the country's domestic politics.

An issue that remained in the background was the nature of South Africa's association with the developing world, as well as the alignments among developing countries themselves. Moreover, the changing power relations between the West and the developing world, which have been hastened by the global financial crisis of the late 2000s, were not remarked upon. It appears likely that the growing power of the developing world and the relative decline of the West will relieve pressure on South Africa to behave liberally. As it stands, liberal principles have already fallen victim to South Africa's desire to confront the West. Although departures from liberalism on the economic front may have progressive consequences, the clearest departures from liberal principles have come on more political issues. These departures from political liberalism threaten the hard-won gains in human rights and democratization of recent decades.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the participants at the Beyond the BICs Workshop, held at the University of Manchester on 13-14 December 2010, for their comments. In particular, I would like to thank James Scott and Matthias vom Hau for their guidance and extensive criticism. Thank you very much also to the journal's three anonymous referees. I am also grateful to the Brooks World Poverty Institute for funding my attendance at the aforementioned workshop.

Endnotes

1. Rwanda completed its peer review in 2006, and Algeria in 2007. Since then, the scores for political rights and civil liberties in these two countries have remained at 6 and 5, respectively (7 is the least free, 1 is the most).
2. South Africa joined the Cairns Group, a coalition of 19 agricultural exporting countries seeking the liberalization of trade in agriculture, in 1998.
3. The Singapore Issues refer to negotiations around trade and investment, government procurement, trade facilitation and competition policy.

4. Agriculture contributes 4 per cent of South Africa's gross domestic product, provides 10 per cent of the jobs in the formal sector and accounts for around 8 per cent of the country's exports (Vickers, 2010, p. 170).

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